PHIL 341:

Ethical Theory
Student data (on cards)

- name, address, phone number, university ID, etc.

- background: especially data on satisfaction of prerequisite (two courses in philosophy)

- please note if you’ve taken a previous course with this instructor, e.g. PHIL 282 last fall

- make sure the university directory has your correct email address (one where you regularly read your email -- for purposes of including you on a “courseemail” list that actually reaches you)
Course data (see syllabus)

- TA: Ryan Fanselow

- contact Ryan for administrative matters such as requests to oversubscribe the course; he can stay to speak with students after class (unlike me this term, unfortunately)

- readings: original texts from historical philosophers (in editions also containing recommended explanatory material)

- requirements: three papers, midterm and final, class participation, possible quizzes
Expectations

- see my website for an idea of the sort of work expected at this level – more demanding than expectations in 100- and 200-level courses

- required readings from historical philosophers take special effort to unravel and interpret; problems of translation, archaic language

- written assignments often ask you to apply what you’ve learned in class to meaty theoretical issues and questions besides what we’ve specifically gone over

- slides from lectures will be posted on the web by the time we’ve finished a given author, but you can’t rely on “distance learning”

- grades adjusted upward at the end of the course, but limited to those who’ve been seriously involved in it

- subject matter more theoretical, less practical, than some of our lower-level courses in ethics; more about this is a second
Once again, with a dark background:

- see “course materials” on my website for an idea of the sort of work expected at this level – more demanding than expectations in 100- and 200-level courses

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- subject matter more theoretical, less practical, than other courses in ethics; more about this in a second
Two approaches to (philosophical) ethics

- Ethical theory can be viewed as a subdivision (along with practical ethics) of
  - **normative ethics**: directly studies questions about what’s right or wrong, good or bad, etc.

  as opposed to

  - **metaethics**: raises more general philosophical questions about what normative ethics amounts to, e.g. what ethical terms mean, the nature and objectivity of moral judgments, how and whether we can verify them, what makes them motivate us, etc.

- see next slide for initial organization chart – to be filled in further with different approaches to normative ethics, as needed to locate central historical figures we’re reading
Locating ethical theory

(Philosophical) Ethics

Metaethics
Normative Ethics

Practical Ethics
Ethical Theory
Two approaches to ethical theory

- ethical theory in turn divides into two main types or approaches:
  - **virtue ethics**: begins by considering what makes a person (or his/her character or motives) morally good: Aristotle, Hume
  - **duty ethics**: focuses on acts or rules and what makes them right: Mill, Kant, Rawls

- filled in on the following slide
Two kinds of duty ethics (1)

- **deontological:**
  - basic concept = *right* (or wrong; duty, ought, etc.), a term applicable to acts; spelled out by rules or principles, e.g. Ten Commandments or other elements of customary or common-sense morality
  - but philosophers organize rules into different theories:
    - Kantianism ("the categorical imperative" as a single principle from which other rules may be derived): Kant
    - *prima facie* duties ("intuitionism"; multiple underived principles capable of conflict): W. D. Ross
    - *contractarianism/contractualism* (multiple principles derived from a social contract, historical or hypothetical): Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau; Gauthier, Rawls, Scanlon, etc.
Two kinds of duty ethics (2)

- consequentialist
  - basic concept = (nonmoral) *good*, applied to an experience or state of affairs
  - right act = act that produces the most good (= best consequences)
  - depending on whose good is in question, divides into:
    - **egoism** (the good of the agent): Epicurus
    - **utilitarianism** (everyone's good): Bentham, Mill
Basic organization chart of ethical theories

(Philosophical) Ethics

- Metaethics
- Normative Ethics

Normative Ethics

- Practical Ethics
- Ethical Theory

Ethical Theory

- Virtue Ethics
- Duty Ethics

Duty Ethics

- Deontological Ethics
- Consequentialism
Two forms of utilitarianism

- variants of utilitarianism depend on how the (nonmoral) good is interpreted:
  - hedonism: happiness = pleasure (and absence of pain) as the only thing that’s intrinsically (vs. instrumentally) good: Bentham, Mill (derived from Epicurus).
  - pluralism: other things besides pleasure count as independent goods, e.g. beauty, knowledge, personal relationships: G. E. Moore

- now we have a full enough chart to locate the first theory we’ll be reading about: Mill’s utilitarianism, also called “classical” or hedonistic utilitarianism (though Mill himself just calls it “utilitarianism”)
Locating Mill’s theory

[Diagram showing the hierarchy of ethical theories, starting with Philosophical Ethics, then Metaethics, Normative Ethics, Practical Ethics, Ethical Theory, Virtue Ethics, Duty Ethics, Deontological Ethics, Consequentialism, Kantianism, Prima Facie Duties, Contractarianism/Contractualism, Egoism, Utilitarianism, Hedonistic Utilitarianism, and Pluralistic Utilitarianism.]